

For more information:

Online visit: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/wrhome.html – click on wells

To leave a recorded message,
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See WAC 173-160.

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Abandoned Wells

Problems and Solutions



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ABANDONED WELLS

It is not uncommon in Washington State to find old wells which are no longer in use. These are called “abandoned wells.”

The most dangerous type of abandoned well is the shallow dug type. Properly closing these and any other wells is called decommissioning. Abandoned wells can pose safety and environmental problems, and are required to be properly decommissioned as soon as possible. There are several ways to decommission a well. The state has written minimum decommissioning standards printed in chapter 173-160 WAC.

What are the specific dangers that abandoned wells pose?



Perhaps the greatest danger associated with abandoned wells is injury or death of people and animals that fall into the well.

Abandoned wells also act as direct conduits, or paths, for contaminants to reach ground water. Contaminants entering the ground water through the well may harm the quality of your drinking water, or the drinking water of your neighbors.

Washington law holds the landowner responsible for decommissioning (properly closing) wells, and therefore liable for any occurrence of contamination.

How do I find abandoned wells?

Knowing the history of the property may help you determine where to look for abandoned wells. It is not uncommon to find as many as three or four wells on some properties.



Since the history is not always known, here are some general tips you may follow when looking for abandoned wells:

- Pipes sticking out of the ground
- Old well houses
- Depressions in the earth
- Concrete vaults, pits, or tile
- Old plywood lying on the ground or over concrete tile or vaults

Also, wells were often constructed in basements of houses, under porch steps, or near cisterns and windmills. Remember, abandoned wells may no longer contain water, but may still pose safety and/or environmental problems.

What should I do when I decide to close down a well?

You will need to contact a licensed well driller to decommission a well. Washington law requires decommissioning of all wells by a licensed driller. A licensed driller will have experience with well construction and decommissioning materials and methods, as well as knowledge of the local geology to safely and properly close a well. Costs to decommission wells will vary depending upon the depth, diameter and geology of the area. Special equipment may be required to remove old pumps and pipes from the well.

You will need to submit a “Notice of Intent to Decommission a Well” to the Department of Ecology at least 72 hours in advance of the work. There is no fee associated with this form. Check with your local county offices to see if there are any other special requirements.



For more information on decommissioning standards, see WAC 173-160.